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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 000145

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STATE FOR NEA/FO (GRAY), NEA/RA, PM AND NEA/MAG (HARRIS AND HOPKINS)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2018
TAGS: MARR PTER PREL PGOV TS
SUBJECT: GOT DISMAYED BY FY09 FMF CUTS

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) On the margins of the February 10-12 visit of a delegation led by S/CT Ambassador-at-Large Dell Dailey (septel), NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary Gordon Gray briefed Foreign Minister Abdelwaheb Abdallah and Defense Minister Kamel Morjane on the expected decline in FY09 Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for Tunisia. DAS Gray explained that the decline was a reflection of the tough budget climate in the United States and said there was no hidden political message for Tunisia. Rather, the State Department had done its best to allocate as much FMF as possible to Tunisia given Congressional earmarks. DAS Gray added that State will continue to look for creative ways to identify other funding opportunities to increase assistance to Tunisia.

¶2. (C) Defense Minister Morjane reacted strongly to Gray's comments, saying the cut has a negative impact on U.S.-Tunisian relations. Morjane said the continued decline in FMF was leading him to believe it is no longer worth the effort to try to lobby for U.S. support. While the ultimate decision was President Ben Ali's, Morjane said his own advice would be to "forget it." Morjane noted that Tunisia is asking for \$10 million in FMF, which is a very important sum for Tunisia but not for the United States. The cut is more difficult to understand when the USG comes to Tunisia, as in the S/CT delegation, to press for Tunisian CT support. The Tunisian military is making every effort and needs no convincing of the necessity of its CT activities, said Morjane. He added that he would raise the same points during the May 2008 Joint Military Commission meetings in Washington.

¶3. (C) Foreign Minister Abdallah elaborated on Morjane's reaction, commenting that the cuts directly affect Tunisia's security. "We need help with our borders because they are difficult to control," said Abdallah, particularly with Algeria. He added that the Tunisian military needs sophisticated border surveillance equipment that the GOT cannot afford because it invests the majority of its budget in developmental programs that address the root causes of terrorism. Abdallah concluded that Tunisia needs U.S. financial assistance, but will continue to fight terrorism regardless of the U.S. contribution.

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